

Tips to Informal Caregivers on Giving Personal Care

Emergency Action Safety

Precautions are needed when there is an ill or disabled person in the home. Check the floors, stairs, hallways, bathrooms and kitchen for clutter. Check the stairs to see that there is a non-skid surface, that edges of the steps are marked and that the stairway is well lighted. The use of night lights in the person's room, in the hallway and in the bathroom are recommended. A flashlight by the bed is also useful. Lighting should be brighter for older people as the ability to see lessens with age.

Small loose rugs should be removed and stored. Check to see that there are no loose tiles or carpets to cause a fall. Floors should not be so highly polished as to make walking hazardous.

Grab bars as well as non-skid strips should be used in the tub. Grab bars at the toilet may also be needed, depending upon the degree of disability. These should be firmly attached to the wall for the person's safety.

Be sure emergency telephone numbers are posted clearly by the telephones. Include telephone numbers for the rescue squad, fire, police, physician and poison control center. It is also advisable to have a current American Red Cross or other first-aid book available in the home for emergency information.

Medical Alert devices are available that will dial a number and deliver a taped distress message when a remote switch, which can be carried up to 100 feet from the base unit, is activated. However, this equipment will not work in all telephone exchanges when the emergency telephone number is a toll call. If you plan to use Medical Alert equipment and the emergency number is a toll call, contact the local telephone service representative for assistance.

Do not leave someone who needs immediate help. Have someone else call for help. When someone needs help but not immediate care to sustain life, the caregiver's responsibility is to prevent more injury, seek medical help and keep the person calm.

Good judgment is needed to give good emergency care. The whole situation must be assessed. One of the first decisions is whether the person should be moved. Try not to move the person. Loosen constricting clothing and examine the person carefully.

Eight Steps in Emergency Action

In order of action:

- Rescue the person if he is in danger.
- Restore and maintain breathing and heartbeat.
- Control heavy bleeding.
- Treat poisoning.
- Prevent shock.
- Examine the person carefully.
- Seek medical help.
- Keep checking the person until medical help is obtained.

The above statements are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. You should always consult with your physician about any health and lifestyle concerns or issues you may have.